

These are the artists in your neighborhood

CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE, heart of the nation, hub of the city; all this and a mixed-use district, too. The live/work ethic that imbues Lower Manhattan prompted neighborhood artists Susan Marenek and Celia Shapiro to organize an exhibit. Titled **MIXED USE DISTRICT**, it opens this week at the Clocktower Gallery, and features images by 18 (mostly local) artists interpreting the community south of Canal.

Diversity, a term often used by pundits and politicians to describe our city, is indeed the word here. Manhattan Community District 1 is a micro-melting pot—a multi-cultural, racially integrated area where businesses, ranging from hardware wholesalers, hairdressers, and four-star restaurants, to 24-hour diners, investment banking firms and relief agencies, may all occupy the same block. Façades from some of the best

18th and 19th century architecture are reflected in the glass towers of the World Trade Center, which loom over streets populated by movie stars, the homeless, and just plain working stiff.

Murray Street is home to Marenek, a painter, and Shapiro, a photographer, who have lived, worked and raised families in adjoining lofts for over a decade. Both women were busy capturing the same

views (in quite different mediums and styles) but they had never seen each other's work. Ah, New York. When each finally saw what the other had been doing, they were stunned by the dissimilar visions. Marenek's 30-foot-long paintings depict the density and compression of brick buildings; Shapiro's Hockneyesque photographs penetrate the private moments of people on rooftops. After an initial, six-hour conversation about the quality of sunlight, they conceived this neighborly exhibition.

The art is as mixed as the neighborhood. These paintings, photographs, architectural drawings, sculpture and assemblages, are all of realistic imagery and thick with local ambience. Rackstraw Downes contributed photorealistic scenes of the Holland Tunnel; there are photos and maquettes by Donna Dennis of her seafaring fence for P.S. 234; and architects Karahan/Schwartz present proposals for creating open space downtown (something the curators and everyone else would like to see more of.)

Marenek and Shapiro revel in their neighborhood, and feel that too many people live and/or work here without truly experiencing the place: Wall Streeters who rarely venture into St. Paul's; Battery Park City residents who never stroll along the Battery. In order to lure people out and about, they've placed art at the top of the Clocktower, 108 Leonard St. (itself a mixed-use building that houses many city agencies on lower floors) and also in the offices of Manhattan Borough President Ruth Messinger (at One Centre Street.) Their greatest worry is that, without more appreciation of the area by its locals, developers might be able to

The show's curators lived and worked in adjoining lofts for a decade before seeing each other's vision.

transform Lower Manhattan into a new version of midtown.

Another part of the project, set in the triangle at the corner of Church and White, is a sculpture installation by long-time Tribeca resident Mimi Gross. This work evolved from a commission to design scenery and costumes for a ballet performed in Japan. The backdrop was created from her nighttime drawings of this street corner, and the dancers wore costumes sketched from its blinking traffic signals. Now, five painted-foam ballerinas will be dancing in the actual intersection, a sort of conceptual role reversal.

New York's light — artificial and natural — has always inspired artists. Tribeca artists are still, as it were, carrying the torch.

The show opens on October 18, and runs through November 18.

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